

April 2013. Vol. 17, No. 2. – Management Strategy for Songzhuang Culture and Creative Industry Cluster: Nan Yang – Personalization of Place: Remixing the Eugene Coloring Book: Emily Hope Dobkin

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Personalization of Place – Remixing the Eugene Coloring Book

Emily Hope Dobkin

For my graduate research study in the Arts Administration department at the University of Oregon, I designed a participatory project that involved remixing a coloring book in both visual and virtual form. This arts-based research has been grounded in how people make meaning from creative documentation of place. I chose to explore this topic by focusing on the community of Eugene, asking the question: How do individuals create meaningful experiences through creative documentation processes?

Background

The coloring book, dating from 1880, has encouraged participants to add color by using crayons, colored pencils, markers, paint, and other art mediums. The emergence of the first coloring book appeared in a time when educators believed students should benefit from art education as a means of enhancing their conceptual understanding of the tangible, further developing cognitive abilities (The Huntington Library, 2003). Coloring books have remained one of the first mediums people use in art, and have gone on to encompass a wide variety of subjects and topics, from the simple to complex. A new interactive platform of its time, the coloring book offered a different kind of active engagement through an artistic process.

In 1979, Rainy Day Press of Eugene, Oregon published [The First Eugene, Oregon Coloring Book](#) by Mike Helm and illustrated by Brad Koekkoek. This coloring book presented twenty pages of outlined pictures and commentary of the Eugene community as it stood then---from [Skinner's Butte](#), to the [University of Oregon](#), to [Saturday Market](#). The purpose of my research project was to rework The First Eugene, Oregon Coloring Book through the process of remixing its content through visual journals and guest blogging from those perspectives who have re-rooted themselves here in Eugene from other places. With the coloring book as a point of reference, my research explores the possibility of using the process of remixing the First Eugene, Oregon Coloring Book as a means to initiate personalization of place.

Because we live in a time in which many people often uproot themselves from one place to the next, it is easy to dismiss appreciating the qualities associated in a given location. It is important for community members to find common threads and connections to one another through certain activities, events, venues, and places. This project continues to serve as beneficial in piecing together the parts of a community, specifically through the lens of the Eugene community that might otherwise appear as fragmented. Just as coloring books have been used to increase understanding of a complex topic or procedure, I have investigated if creative documentation of a place can offer an increased understanding of the sense of home, place, and community from assorted, diverse and varying perspectives.

What is "remixing?"

At the most basic level, remixing is the reworking of a pre-existing work. A remix “may be subtle, or it may completely redefine how the work comes across. It may add elements from other works, but generally efforts are focused on creating an alternate version of the original,” (Lamb, 2007, p. 12). In Lamb’s article, “Dr. Mashup; or, Why Educators Should Learn to Stop Worrying and Love the Remix,” he goes on to describe how elements of reuse have always been present in creative work; after all, artistic and scholarly works build on the work of others. Undoubtedly, the rise of digital media has pushed the practice of remixing to new levels of interactivity, accessibility, and imagination.

Realizing Personalization of Place

(re:)Mixing Visually

Initially, seven sketchbooks containing copies of the pages from *The First Eugene, Oregon Coloring Book* were given to individuals throughout Eugene. Participants were asked to remix these pages within the sketchbook so that their work would illustrate their own perspective of Eugene, specifically in what makes Eugene “home.” Some of these participants chose to expand beyond the boundaries of the sketchbook; one participant formatted their remix in a [diorama](#), another through a [photo essay](#). Each chose to adapt their own personal art making style and voice to better address the themes found within the pages of the coloring book.

(re:)Mixing Virtually

The [Eugene Coloring Book blog](#) features [scanned images](#) of the pages from the original coloring book. Each of the pages has been correlated with a specific topic that applies to and describes life in Eugene today. Remixing these pages in digital format simply means anyone of the Eugene community can “reconfigure” a page by providing their personal perspective on the identified topics. All that is required is to add a story under the heading “Leave A Reply.”

For example:

[Page One](#) – features Eugene Skinner and how he made Eugene his home. This specific page is dedicated to posts from guest bloggers/participants who have documented their personal stories of settling in Eugene. Read what has accumulated from [blog posts](#).

Community members can easily click on a page and leave a comment or story from their personal perspective on the identified topics. Selected participants are sent e-mails requesting photos that correlate with their stories, which then are then arranged on the blog portion of the website. Here are just a few examples:

Coloring in Page 5 – [Saturday Market](#)

Coloring in Page 6 – [The Eugene Food Scene](#)

Coloring in Page 12 – [The Characters of Eugene](#)

What has been most interesting is learning what pages have been most popular to post on; to date those have been the [University of Oregon](#), [Eugene Sports: GO Ducks!](#), [The Eugene Food Scene](#), and [Saturday Market](#) pages, all representative of gathering spaces. This helped confirm that people felt inclined to reflect upon places where a sense of community connection can be felt.

The Eugene Coloring Book Exhibition

The outcome of these remix processes culminated first in an exhibition at the [Downtown Initiative for Visual Arts](#) gallery (DIVA; May-June 2012) and is currently being exhibited at the [Lane County Historical Museum](#) (LCHM; October 2012-October 2013). As the final product of this project, the exhibition is intended to convey a visual voice of Eugene. I approached the exhibit as a transmediation of *The First Eugene, Oregon Coloring Book*, by telling stories through multiple media platforms. Moreover, it has served as an informal learning environment where community members can explore rich examples of both the digital and tangible remixes and develop their own set of thoughts, beliefs, and core values for assessing themselves as a community members of Eugene. Visitors are encouraged to interact with the original pages on a variety of levels including: turning the pages and [exploring the visual remixes](#),

rolling an “[anablog](#),” a physical blog roll that contains highlights from the [virtual blog roll](#), remixing at a [coloring station](#) where the original pages and art supplies are available, and various areas for visitors to [comment](#) and [share](#) their [personal stories](#) in connection to the pages.

There is one major difference between the exhibition at DIVA and LCHM, and this difference is quite significant. The original exhibit at DIVA explored specifically both physical and digital spaces; there were technical elements made accessible; [iPads](#) were set up for visitors to color in the pages “virtually,” and [a computer](#) was secured for visitors to explore and leave personal stories pertaining to the original pages so that the project continued to evolve.

At the LCHM, the project has continued to grow through added historical layers and community voices. With [archival photos now juxtaposed to the original coloring book pages](#), the concept of “remixing” is currently being redefined. Instead of sharing stories online, thoughts and stories are being shared in [notebooks](#) contrasted with archival photos related to the coloring book pages and themes. This has allowed community members to think more about the “then” and “now,” and their personal connection in time and place. This is perhaps my most favorite example: [farm life](#).

Discoveries

In facilitating this project, I have found that the process of remixing a coloring book has motivated community members to think more deeply about the places and everyday experiences. In specific regards to making meaning and personalizing the Eugene community through creative documentation processes, The First Eugene, Oregon Coloring Book has proven to be an effective point of reference for participants to delve into their experiences within the place and community of the local.

Evidence of Discoveries

While this was still a research project, I constructed an online survey in which participants answered questions in relation to their process of remixing. Notes that have accumulated in a comment book and now on a comment board at LCHM have allowed me to further evaluate this process.

Individuals who remixed the coloring book visually all remarked that the coloring book has been a beneficial starting point when asked to share personal experiences specific to Eugene. One participant expressed that having the coloring book as a point of reference, “has been fun to reflect on what makes this city special and what I love about this place. Until now I haven’t fully realized a project that set these thoughts down on paper or expressed them as publicly” (Anonymous, survey, May 16, 2012).

Similarly, those who remixed the coloring book virtually all remarked that the coloring book has been a resourceful reference point in personalizing Eugene. A virtual remixing participant mentioned that, “I really appreciated the semi-structured nature of the coloring book in the sense that there were directive themes, but they were broad enough to be taken in several directions and personalized,” (Anonymous, survey, May 16, 2012).

Other thoughts surrounding the original pages include how the coloring book pages have provided me with topics from which to choose when deciding what to contribute. Some things I had already thought about before, such as the difference in the look of the homes here and the look of the homes where I came from. Other topics such as the music scene are something I hadn’t much considered previously, but when prompted, I saw how my experiences seeing live music in Eugene contributed to my beginning to feel at home here. (Anonymous, survey, May 16, 2012).

A wide range of remixes has been contributed. Some participants dabbled, some dug a little deeper, but overall, it remains evident that The Eugene Coloring Book Project has triggered participants to think about this community beyond just being the place they live to a place they can call home and feel a sense of pride for the community. One Eugenian told me that he felt the project is like a love letter to Eugene; it sings praises and honors the various elements and attributes that make this community what it is.

Application to Community Arts

The Eugene Coloring Book Project (May 4, 2012-June 30, 2012, DIVA Center Gallery) (October 6, 2012-October 2013, Lane County Historical Museum) can serve as a model in which a community utilizes creative expression and documentation processes through a variety of multimodal access points. In doing so, this project has allowed different, yet all engaging, platforms for people to share and connect to one another. Overall, The Eugene Coloring Book Project stands as an example of how a participatory project can create new opportunities for active engagement from a wide range of community members of all ages.

Being adaptable has been imperative in this project's journey. With the exhibit aspect of the project now being housed at LCHM, I had to let go of the technology elements that once were included and important as multimodal entry points for participants. The added historical photos have personally made this project more meaningful in being able to explore the foundation of the Eugene community going beyond the publication of the 1979 coloring book.

I think the ultimate value in this project lies in its ability to connect people through shared experiences and to further contribute to the understanding of a particular community. It has enabled the Eugene community to explore new ways to access information about the community through art, technology, history, and storytelling.

When examining a community's identity, there are always different modes of processing the culture associated with a community. The Eugene Coloring Book Project has exemplified various access points that allow the ability to explore a place across several different media platforms. The [Oregon Daily Emerald](#) (2012) described the project as a "hands on affair" (paragraph 8). At the most basic level, The Eugene Coloring Book Project has drawn community members to an interactive physical site where they can take notice of their surroundings, touch, talk about, and continue to explore through a space that also inhabits a virtual environment. The display of The Eugene Coloring Book exhibition at the Lane County Historical Museum continues to suggest how people of a community experience and make sense of a particular place, with varying interpretations from one person to the next. The culture of a place has not been shaped for the people of the community; individuals shape the culture and their own personal landscapes of a community.

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Author Note

Emily Hope Dobkin is currently the Programs Associate at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History and holds a Master's in Arts Management from the University of Oregon with a focus in Community Arts. She has studied various art forms that have inspired her to facilitate a range of engaging arts opportunities in cultural organizations including Parks and People Foundation's SuperKids (Baltimore, MD), Centerstage (Baltimore, MD), Southern Exposure (San Francisco, CA), The 1000 Journals Project (San Francisco, CA), the Maude Kerns Art Center (Eugene, OR), the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (Eugene, OR) and Lane County Historical Museum (Eugene, OR).

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